

A
Golden
Age

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts Degree in English at East West University



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*Concept of History in Tahmima Anam's
A Golden Age*

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Submission date- 28 April 2011.

Preface

At the end of my M.A degree, I went to talk with my advisor Dr. Shamsad Mortuza about my dissertation topic. At that time, he offered me several contemporary topics. Among those topics, I select *A Golden Age*. The reason(s) could be that as a prominent & post-liberation war generation, her debut novel might be interested. Moreover, I have been always nurturing 1971 since my childhood. That is why it hits my memory.

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I confirm that this dissertation is my own work. All quotes from secondary sources are cited with due acknowledgement.

(Hasan Mahmud)

Acknowledgement

At first, I am grateful to the Almighty Allah to give me the strength to accomplish this research. Besides, my parents play a supporting role, which boosts me a lot for this research. Most importantly, my honorable advisor & teacher Dr. Shamsad Mortuza guided me all throughout of my dissertation. Finally, last but not the least Mr. Enam (an administrator of NUB) makes this paper a final touch.

Abstract

The paper tries to understand Tahmima Anam's project of writing history of the Liberation War of 1971. Based on E.H. Carr's idea of history, I have tried to explain the selective and interpretive mode of Anam's subjective historiography. In particular, I am interested to understand how her writing is different from objective news reporting on liberation war and subjective and overtly passionate war literature. I shall argue that as a post-war generation writer, Anam has tried to pursue a moderate middle path in order to avoid many historical controversies.

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Freedom, you are
An arbour in the garden, the koel's song,
Glistening leaves on banyan trees,
My notebook of poetry, to scribble as I please.

(Source: *Shadhinota Tumi*, Shamsur Rahman

Translated by- Kaiser Haq)

Chapter-01: introduction

1.1 A Golden Age: A War History

Commonwealth prizewinner Tahmima Anam's book *A Golden Age* was published in 2007. The book deals with the liberation war of Bangladesh that took place in 1971. The history of Bangladesh's liberation war involves with the incomparable human struggle, brutal genocide, racial existence of Bengalis during war and their urge for ultimate freedom. Anam's novel, albeit in its limited capacity, is an attempt to deal with these issues. While the raw materials of her novel are history itself, Anam's approach to history is subjective.

Anam is a post-war child who was born in Bangladesh in 1975. She lived in Paris, New York and Bangkok as a child. Her sources of history of the liberation war of Bangladesh are based mostly on heresy or archival research. She did a comprehensive survey of other fiction and films that involve the struggle for freedom. She also talked to various students, teachers, and guerilla fighters to complement her understanding of the liberation war. Her father is a noted journalist and editor; Mahfuz Anam, the Editor of the premier English daily of Bangladesh--*The Daily Star*. Her grandfather Abul Mansur was an equally important figure of the liberation war. Anam's mother Parvin Anam is a leading NGO leader. Growing up in such a culturally heightened family, Anam earned a privileged access to the civil society that was directly instrumental behind the making of the nation. In other words, she grew up in a family that has many stories related to the history of Bangladesh. After all, the political integrity and personal commitment of his grandfather's generation were responsible for the birth of the nation. They were the inhabitants of what might be considered as the golden age of Bangladesh politics.

It is no surprise then that; Tahmima chose to write her maiden novel on the liberation war of Bangladesh. The book refers to various historical incidents such as different political speeches of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, declaration of independence from Racecourse ground (presently Sohrawardy ground), programs aired from Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, and the national election of 1970.

The facts from the pages of history get a fictive garb in Anam's narrative. The span of Anam's history ranges from March 1959 to 16 December 1971. This novel falls into 10 chapters, and follows a chronological order in giving the history of a tumultuous decade behind the glorious birth of the nation. Anam gradually develops the war history in several sections of her book, maintains a ray of tension between some personal confrontation and the nation's overall survival. Soheli (the protagonist and the son of Rehana Haque) and Maya are two main characters in this novel. From the beginning, they create an imbalance into their mother's eyes. Maya does not get the priority that Soheli receives.

Moreover, the title of this book *A Golden Age* refers to the generation that denotes '71 as a classic moment history that can be classified as a golden age—an era of achievement, an age of sacrificing honor and an age of enlightenment. Interestingly, this historical book falls short of referring to blood shedding, sacrificing lives and operations during 1971. Subsequently, Anam transforms those histories through the point of view of her protagonist. In a word, history of this book circulates around some personal trivial stories. Most importantly, author focuses personal achievements, losses and rewinds the characters auspicious past lives in a morbid way. It looks like a collage of personal story than a liberation history. Somehow, the tale of tragic loss, a

common theme in other liberation war fiction, is absent here. Anam has broken away from the traditional role of history telling. Finally, this fiction is a little bit different in case of historical analysis from other liberation fiction of Bangladesh.

1.2 Story vs. History

In Spanish, the single word that combined story with history is *historia*. History as a narrative is a collection of the stories of the past, often told from the perspectives of those who are in power. However, history, as an academic discipline has the aura of being objective. Generally, an author narrates any historical story in either objective or subjective way. A historian must make claims on the past based on archival documents or historical relics. She or he can also rely on the oral tradition in which information of the past is relayed from the former generation to the next through words of mouth.

E.H Carr's seminal book *What is History?* help us to understand the debate between subjectivity and objectivity. The classic idea of history is bound to be objective. Historian Ranke comments in 1890: "Historian's duty is to show the history what it exactly was" (Carr 1991:3). Carr rejected the view that a historian accumulates "facts". Carr maintained, "The belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy, but one which it is very hard to eradicate". In his support, Carr gave the famous example of crossing the Rubicon. Although millions of people had crossed the Rubicon, historians had declared only Julius Caesar's crossing in 49 BC noteworthy. Carr divided facts into two categories: "facts of the past", that is historical information that historians deem

unimportant, and "historical facts", information that the historians have decided is important. Carr contended that historians quite arbitrarily determine which of the "facts of the past" to turn into "historical facts" according to their own biases and agendas. Carr stated:

Study the historian before you begin to study the facts. This is, after all, not very abstruse. It is what is already done by the intelligent undergraduate who, when recommended to read a work by that great scholar Jones of St. Jude's, goes round to a friend at St. Jude's to ask what sort of chap Jones is, and what bees he has in his bonnet. When you read a work of history, always listen out for the buzzing. If you can detect none, either you are tone deaf or your historian is a dull dog. The facts are not at all like fish on the fishmonger's slab. They are like fish swimming about in a vast and sometimes inaccessible ocean; and what the historian catches will depend partly on chance, but mainly on what part of the ocean he chooses to fish in and what tackle he chooses to use – these two factors being, of course, determined by the kind of fish he wants to catch. Largely, the historian will get the kind of facts he wants. History means interpretation. Indeed, if, standing Sir George Clark on his head, I were to call history "a hard core of interpretation surrounded by a pulp of disputable facts", my statement would, no doubt, be one-sided and misleading, but no more so, I venture to think, than the original dictum" (quoted in Wikipedia)

Anam's story is interpretive and selective history, and she has chosen her part of the ocean to cast her net. By choosing to write a fiction based on a time that came before her time, she had

decided to rely on the filtered memory of others. Her grandfather's role in the liberation war as a freedom fighter probably helped her to frame her narrative, and look at the history of the liberation war from a subjective stance.

Just like Carr points out the controversy over the Battle of Hastings (Carr 1991:4), we can find similar confusion over our declaration of Independence. According to Carr, the Battle of Hastings could have taken place in 1065 or 1067 instead of the established date 1066, and even the place could be *Eastbourne or Brighton* instead of Hastings. Similarly, we find that there is confusion over the declaration of the independence; both 26 March and 27 March are suggested. However, Anam has written on her book that it was 26 March (Anam 2008:65). According to Carr, Anam has fixed this date, as she wants that this date is important or she pre-determined about the placement of this historical account. A historian decides which history says in which way, which information, which way of telling (Carr 1991:5). If a historian thinks that this information or that information are worthy enough to say then he/she would mention it, otherwise not (*ibid*).

Moreover, when we select a historical book then we should not consider its inner information rather we should consider the historian of that book (Carr 1991:17). Both history and historical information are interconnected (Carr 1991:25). Because historian is, a part of present and information are past (*ibid*). Croache comments: "Every history is contemporary history" (Carr 1991:15). That means history is to see the past through the present's eye and historian's duty is not documentation rather evaluation (*ibid*).

Carr says, “In first speech I said: before realizing history realize historian (Carr 1991:40). Now I shall add; before realizing historian realizes his historical and social environment (*ibid*).

Finally, according to Carr’s philosophy, historical stories are supplementary with each other. Historian will decide what should be on his text, what is not, which stories get priority, which not and how the histories will present before the audience (Carr 1991:10-11).

1.3 A historical account of 1971

The history of liberation war in Bangladesh is divided into several decades. Generally, it started with the advent of *Bongo Bhongo Rodh* (Annual of the Partition of Bengal) in 1905 (Mostafa, 2003). Bengal leader named A.K. Fazlul Haque proposed the issue of Bangladesh’s establishment in Lahore proposal but it rejected in 1947 (*ibid*). Then we see 1952 language movement that was inevitable for each bangalee to establish Bangla as their national language. Later on, by following 1952 these significant years comes- 1959, 1970 and finally 1971. For example- 1959, 1970 and 1971 stand for six points demand from bangalee, year of election and liberation war of Bangladesh respectively. Bangladesh’s liberation war started with the 6-point demand by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Islam 1999:11). With this 6-point demand, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman wants Pakistan to be a confederation, so that colonialism ends in East Pakistan, but Pakistan remains undivided (*ibid*).

Moulana Vashani and A.K. Fazlul Haque are the two most remarkable leaders to promote the nation into the liberation war. They called as forerunners of our liberation war history.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the founder of today's Bangladesh. His declaration of independence on 7 March in 1971 became as an inspiration for our nation (Anam 2007:50). As a result, people jumped into the historical war of 71 from every pros and cons of Bangladesh. No other nation except Bangladesh has sacrificed so many lives for the sake of language. It is unforgettable even the role of our four national leaders- Tajuddin Ahmed, Syed Nazrul Islam, Md. Kamruzzaman and Captain Mansoor Ali. Among them, Tajuddin Ahmed and Syed Nazrul Islam are the Prime Minister and acting President respectively on that period (Joyenuddin 2009:18). These persons govern the whole nation during 1971.

The night of 25 March of 1971 called as *black night* as on that night west Pakistani general Yahiya Khan's soldiers started to kill the innocent, armless Bangalee. Innumerable people were killed by this brutal genocide of west Pakistani army. Unfortunately, some of our compatriots conspire against their own country! They are known as *Rajakar*, *Al-badar* (collaborators) and the like. They were against the independence of Bangladesh as they supported the rule of West Pakistan. They acted as accomplices of west Pakistanis and they did not even hesitate to hand over the freedom fighters to Pakistani army. Innumerable heinous histories and stories have written about their collaboration with Pakistani army.

Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra (Radio center of free Bengal) had also played an incomparable role during the war. Those employees on radio fought through their voices besides freedom fighters. In order to inspire the whole nation, they frequently transmitted several patriotic songs, poems, speech etc. Of these programmes, the most popular was the satirical *Charam Patra* (Ultimatum) broadcast by the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra (Quadir 2004:78). Mr. M. R.

Akhter (Mukul) used to prepare and read the programme script (*ibid*). Belal Mohammad set up this radio station with the help of Major Ziaur Rahman (Mohammad 1983:3). He is the entrepreneur, organizer and director of this radio station (*ibid*). On 27 March 1971, Major Ziaur Rahman declared:

“I, Major Zia, provincial commander in chief of the Bangladesh liberation army, hereby proclaim, on behalf of our great national leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the independence of Bangladesh” (Anam & Mohammad 65:40).

Before this declaration from Major Zia, Bangabandhu (Friend of Bengal) Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared on 7 March 1971, Racecourse Ground (Presently Suhrawardy ground):

“...since we have already shed our blood, we are ready to shed more blood, we shall surely free the people of this country, by the grace of Allah. The struggle of this time is for freedom, this struggle is for our independence”. (Quadir 2004:17)

Because of this there is a notion that Independence Day should be observed on 7th march instead of 26th march as declaration of independence came on 7th march (Quadir 2004:17). 27 March's declaration was just the repetition of 7 March's declaration (*ibid*). Major Ziaur Rahman addressed before nation on behalf of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Anam, Quadir & Mohammad 65:17:40). In magazine *Weekly News*, Belal gave an interview:

“If addresser means radio addresser, then both 1st and 2nd addresser is M.A Hannan. Major Zia's declaration was 3rd. Moreover, in every respect these declarations came on behalf of Bangabandhu”. (Mohammad 1983:169).

Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra program started from *mukto anchol* (freed territory) on 3 April (Mohammad 1983:22). Agartola referred as *mukto anchol* and Kolkata as Mujibnagar (Mohammad 1983:17). In the first phase, it transmitted from Kalurghat office (in Chittagong) from 26th march to 30th march (Safi & Mohammad 301:17). Secondly, it transmitted from Agartola from 3 April to 25th may (*ibid*). Finally, from Kolkata Baliganj road from 25th may to 16th or 23 December (*ibid*). Regarding the role of Swadheen Bangla Betar Kendra former acting president Syed Nazrul Islam comment on a meeting in Mujibnagar (26th march 1971):

“You (the people at Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra) provide a ray of hope in such a period, when we have no expectation in our country” (Mohammad 1983:22).

Under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first republic government of Bangladesh was formed on 10 April 1970 (Joyenuddin 2009:18). In 17 April 1971, first government of Bangladesh’s oath took place in Meherpur’s Baidyanathtola (*ibid*). Thereafter, 17 April has been observed as Mujibnagar Day (*ibid*). Colonel (retired.) M.A.G Osmani (chief of the Bengal army) divided the whole Bangladesh into 11 sectors (*ibid*).

Apart from these accounts, foreign newspapers and magazines also upheld the brutal genocide of 1971.

Here I cite some foreign journals to give a glimpse of the history of 1971:

The New York Times, 28 March 1971

“the resistance which began after a surprise attack on the civilian population by the government forces three nights ago sprang from a non-violent drive for provincial autonomy. The East

Pakistanis tried to claim the majority political power they had won in the election last December and the army moved to prevent this.” (Quadir 2004:395)

The Baltimore Sun, 4 April 1971

“...the West army has shown every sign of being prepared to send its last soldier to more populous East Bengal, if necessary, in an all-out effort to shoot to death the results of last December’s elections.” (Quadir 2004:397)

Daily Telegraph, 15 April 1971

“their own losses have been so far heavier, but Bengalis in their thousands are continuing the fight and constantly replacing the dead. I found their morale consistently high despite their desperate situation, and there is no doubt of their readiness to fight to the death.” (Quadir 2004:399)

Daily Mirror, 14 June 1971

“It is now clear that what has happened in East Pakistan is not just the suppression of an insurrection but mass slaughter”

“the military government of West Pakistan is waging a war of selective genocide and of starvation against 2% of the human race-the 75 million of Bangladesh.” (Quadir 2004:403)

Anandabazar newspaper, 8 May 1971

“Bengal’s freedom would come through bloodbath”- Moulana Vashani (Islam 1999:56)

Anandabazar newspaper, 23 April 1971

“Today every territory of Bengal is blooded with 10 million bangalee and Bengal’s freedom would be come through this bloodbath (Islam 1999:57).

TERRIBLE MASSACRE

On April 8, EVENING STARNDERD carried a lead story under caption “Pakistan: The Full Horror”. A banner headline proclaimed: “Bengalis were killed in their thousands. The Army was rounding up people and machine-gunning them...they were shot from behind dogs.” The paper said: “Thousands of Bengalis have been killed and their corpses piled high and left to rot in the streets of East Pakistan. Hundreds of children were among those who met bloody deaths in a ‘terrible massacre’ in the port of Chittagong. These were among the tales of horror told at Heathrow Airport today when 15 British refugees flew in from Calcutta after fleeing the civil war in East Pakistan. (Quadir 2004:503).

About 30 million people martyred during the liberation war of Bangladesh. Besides, innumerable people wounded or lost during the war. After the independence of Bangladesh, 7 Freedom Fighters were awarded the title of **Bir Shreshtho**, 68 Freedom Fighters were titled **Bir Uttam**, 175 Freedom Fighters were titled **Bir Bikram** and 426 Freedom Fighters were titled **Bir Protik** for their unusual bravery and courage in the war of Independence (Quadir 2004:369).

Women sacrifice their most valuable- honor during the war. The women who were physically abused by the occupation forces of the Pakistan military during the war of liberation were called

Birangona (war Heroines) (Quadir 2004:78). After the independence, Bangladesh *Junior Chambers (Jaycees)* took up the Birangona project to rehabilitate the Heroines (*ibid*). Among other Birangona, only two women were awarded the title of Bir Protik for their heroic bravery in the freedom struggle (*ibid*). They were **Taramon Bibi**, the great freedom fighter from Kurigram and **Captain Dr. Sitara** of Kishoreganj (*ibid*).

1.4 1971 as a Golden Age

As an independent nation, Bangladesh can be proud for 1971's war. This is the year of regeneration, birth of a new country. It is certainly a golden period for every Bangladeshi. Its significance we find even a Calcutta shopkeeper's voice in Anam's book *A Golden Age-*

'Where are you from- are you Joy Bangla?'

'Sorry?'

'Are you from Dhaka? Bangladesh? Joy Bangla?'

No actually, she thought, I am from Calcutta. But she said,

'Yes I'm Joy Bangla'

'Ten percent discount,' he said smiling. 'Ten percent refugee discount' ... And then he looked at her with such fatherly tenderness.' You come back here when you need anything.

'Anything at all.'

Suddenly the man was a blur. He waved his hand at her. ‘Please, don’t cry! You want a Choc bar? Milon, get my daughter here a choc bar. Don’t cry, Ma, don’t cry’. (Anam 2007:226).

This is the year 1971, when every Bengali fought hard for their freedom as a deprived nation years after years. West Pakistani was flourishing day by day by sipping the blood of East Pakistani. In 1971, it reached its climax when West Pakistan started massacre on East Pakistan’s people indiscriminately. Eventually, East Pakistani sacrifices everything to achieve their freedom from the bloody West Pakistani. This is the year when the people of Bangladesh got a great leader like Bangabandhu sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This is the year we got Major Ziaur Rahman, our four national leaders and others. The year of loosing lives, loosing honor, losing properties and at the same time dreaming of a new nation as the time went by.

1971 is not only a golden period for the liberation war generation but also for post war generation. *My Blood-Ridden freedom* is the book where Dr. Mushtari Safi describes how she lost her husband, her brother and her involvement with Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra. There is no doubt that 71 was a golden period of her life that she faces so many tumultuous situations. In a position, her husband says to her:

“I’ll do through my physiology; you’ll do through your literary and social work” (Safi 1989: 75).

A Japanese engineer Takashiwada wrote a letter to Safi in 26 December 1971-

‘Mushtari’

Your letter hurt me intensely. Bangladeshi people are fighting for their freedom. We know that. But such cruelty, brutality were happening, is unknown to me. You are also the victim

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for the country? I feel bad to think. How I condole you, do not know. God pacify you. You are struggling for your rights, our govt. and people are with you...

Good wish.

Takashiwada

20/11/71

(Safi 1989:283).

In the closing chapter, we get another heart touching letter written by Bangladeshi rural poet Jasimuddin to Calcutta's poet Manoj Basu-

'Manoj'

Receive my blooded wish. Our dream has become true finally. What you have not thought, we have done it in reality. Our country is now fully free. You can proud for us. Will you come here and see? Our country -freedom Bangladesh?

Good wish.

Jasimuddin

20/12/71

(Safi 1989:301).

Above two letters are different in their perspectives. At the same time these two shows sorrows, struggling and the taste of victory in 71. These are only two among many. It reflects how

Independence was desirable and how this 1971 personifies in each Bengali's life. In no other year except 1971 could be as significant as 1971 that left a golden mark in our history.

Chapter- 02

War & Fiction

2.1 Liberation war and fiction

Many books have written about the glorious year of 1971. Books like- Nilima Ibrahim's *Birangona Speaking*, Selina Hossen's *Liberation War Stories*, Golam Mostafa's (ed.) *Never Forget, Never Forget; 25 years of Liberation*, *Liberation is for Eternity*, Dr. Mushtari Safi's *My Blood-Ridden Freedom*, Mostafa Hossein's *Barbaric 71*, Khaleque-Bin-Joyenuddin's *Bangladesh's Freedom and Bangabandhu* etc. Besides, there are some well-known texts like- Jahanara Imam's *Ekatturer dinguli*, Prothoma Prokashon's *Ekatturer Chiti*. Among all of the texts of 1971, some of them are autobiographical and others are historical. Books like- Jahanara Imam's *Ekatturer dinguli*, Prothoma Prokashon's *Ekatturer Chiti*, Safi's *My Blood-Ridden Freedom* these are historical and autobiographical texts.

Safi's *My Blood-Ridden Freedom* is an autobiographical novel of 1971. In this novel, Safi depicts every day of 71 from March to December and she was involved with Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra and its function. She was also involved with monthly magazine *Friend* since 1964 until 1971 (Safi 1989:75). She is the witness of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra's birth (Safi 1989:89). There is a reference of Bir Shreshtho Matiur Rahman in her book:

"I never forget these 12 pilots especially pilot Sharfuddin, Group Captain Khaleque and Captain Matiur's contribution. Call me as a sister. Captain Khaleque and wing commander Sharfuddin died soon after the liberation by a plane crash. Matiur martyred during the war" (Safi 1989:189).

Mushtari Safi worked in Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra by a pseudonym Umme Kulsum (Safi 1989: 271). At first, her program's name was- Women contribution on country formation and later it changed into Women in Bengal's battlefield (*ibid*).

Apart from Safi's book, Nilima Ibrahim's *Birangona Speaking* finds out some Birangona's painful stories. This book shows their physical as well as mental condition. They are not getting absolute recognition or even getting acceptance to their societies or families, which they were fought for. This book shows some poor conditions of Bangladeshi society towards the abused women.

Selina Hossen's *Liberation war stories* are a collection of short stories where Hossen's characters are struggling with their social as well as economic condition despite being freedom fighters. They liberated the country but ironically, now they are fighting for their own existence! Even sometimes, their lives are becoming worse when they sued as criminals!

Finally, Prothoma Prokashon's *Ekatturer Chiti* (letters of 71) brings out some heroic letters of 1971. Sons write these letters to mothers, to fathers, husbands to wives etc. These types of letters reveal affection towards person, barbarity of the war, heroism and bravery of our valiant freedom fighters during the year of 1971.

All of the above books are dealing with the different perspectives of our liberation war history. Survivals, witnesses of 71 encapsulate the year through their writings. There are some books- *Ekatturer dinguli*, *Ekatturer Chiti*, *Ekatturer diary*, *A Golden Age*, which got worldwide recognition for its contents, for its unique stories and histories. Now, in next point I will analyze some texts that written about 1971.

2.2 Fictions on 1971

There are number of fictions that tell about some of the hardships and bitter experiences of 1971. Books like- Jahanara Imam's *Ekatturer dinguli*, Prothoma Prokashon's *Ekatturer Chiti*, Mushtari Safi's *My Blood-Ridden freedom*, Nilima Ibrahim's *Birangona speaking* well known fictions of bloody 71. Prothoma Prokashon's *Ekatturer Chiti* is a book of letters, which are written about 1971.

Here are some excerpts of letters-

Dear mother,

When you will get this letter, I will be many miles away from you. Mom, I know you would not let me go, that is why I am going without saying you. When I could take revenge of my mother-sister's dishonor and could free my golden Bengal motherland from enemies, only then your son would return to your lap.

Pray for me Ma so that my dream would be fulfilled.

Your

Unfortunate son

(Ahmed 2009:14)

In another letter-

Mother,

Were you calling me? It seems to me that you were calling me by name, your tears falling upon my chest, you are so crying. I could not respond to your call. That is why you harassed by calling me repeatedly.

Ishaq

(Ahmed 2009:52)

Nilima Ibrahim's *Birangona Speaking* tells about some heart-rending stories of Birangona (war Heroine). Mrs. Nielsen, Meherjaan, Rina, Shefa, Moyna, Fatema, Mina all are the victims of 1971. These Birangonas fought in 71 through their body. They lost their most valuable wealth-honor in war. Unfortunately, these victims did not get appropriate justice, honor, and sympathy for their contribution. Rather they have been harassing, distorting their name Birangona as Barangona (prostitute), and inflicting several social disgraces to them even to their families. In the first chapter of this book, we get such a picture when Nielsen says:

"... Sister, country has liberated. Someone survived, someone martyred. Some Bir Uttam, Bir Shreshtho, some minister, ambassador everybody got so much honor. But me? I never want anything, just want my womanhood's honor and take shelter to my favorite motherland. In my homeland, I have no real identity. Tara Benarjee has died. There Mrs. Nielsen got honor, majesty everything but Tomas's mother. Where am I? I am cursed, infamous, and dead (Ibrahim 1998:34)

In the next chapter:

... “Oh my motherland, pardon me. Lack of courage to die, I lost you because of life’s greed. This is my sin. I will not beg your pardon because I would not get it. I’m a lonely, oppressed girl having no name, no caste...” (Ibrahim 1998:58)

In chapter 3:

“I prepared to embark on a new life... haven’t we contributed to achieve that flag those who are now leaving this country... Father, mother, wife and children are getting honor, sympathy but where are we? Have ever been designate a street’s name by a Birangona? Are not they martyring as dead? Then why is this injustice? (Ibrahim 1998:69-70)

I put these long excerpts to juxtapose the objective reporting on history with various subjective versions of history. This prepares me for a textual analysis of Tahmima Anam’s *A Golden Age*.

Chapter-03

3. A Golden Age – Textual study

The book *A Golden Age* is a historiographic fiction that evolves with the gain and loss of a family. Rehana Haque is the protagonist of this novel. Her two children- Sohel and Maya get directly involved with the liberation war; Rehana out of her motherly affection tried to prevent her children from getting into the fight. Finally, all of them survive from the war's brutal forces.

The book, divided in 10 chapters, covers a decade. It opens in a dramatic fashion: "Dear husband, I lost my children today" (Anam 2007:3).

The opening chapter (March 1959) glances at Rehana's past life. Then we see her brother-in-law Fayeze and his wife Parvin take Rehana's children to Pakistan. Besides, Anam narrates some of her characters' likings and disliking.

The following chapter (March 1971) touches the war of 1971. The whole East Pakistan (presently Bangladesh) agitated against West Pakistan. Meanwhile, Rehana got back her children, praying regularly for her late husband Iqbal along with her kids.

The next chapter (25 March 1971) labeled as Operation Searchlight where the West Pakistani began massacre upon the innocent, unarmed East Pakistani. Rehana, Sohel, Maya, Sabir, Silvi all feel restless and helpless in such a situation. At the end of this chapter, we get a historical proclamation of independence from Major Ziaur Rahman (Anam 2007:65).

In Chapter-4 (April, Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra) Sohel gets involved with war. As an affectionate mother, Rehana tries to prevent her son but fails. Later, her daughter also revolts against her own mother Rehana! Joining in war, liberating as well as contributing for the country is such excessive desires in that period. We see this reflection in Sohel and Maya's eyes.

The War occupies the backdrop of the narrative. In Chapter-5, Anam says 1 million refugees from Bangladesh took shelter in West Bengal and struggling there to survive for the basic needs (Anam 2007:98-99). A bomb attack occurred in hotel Inter-continental (Sheraton Hotel), orchestrated by the freedom fighters (Anam 2007:113). Apart from these incidents, in Rehana's house an Army Major took shelter with whom she falls in love.

In next chapter (June) Rehana describes her past life, her memories to the unknown major. Feeling lonely, she shares her everything with this stranger.

The next chapter (July, red-face bird) is talking about a civilian's restoration by Rehana. She takes some bold steps here to free a civilian called Sabir (husband of Silvi) from the custody of West Pakistani. She could be killed, could be raped but remain in safe finally.

Chapter-8 (August, September and October) takes place in Salt-lake, West Bengal. Rehana moves there to observe her daughter, Maya's activities. She stays there with a refugee camp, helps her daughter and others. She keeps herself busy with the young men and women, met with some known faces, experienced some tragedies etc.

Chapter-9 (November) is a reunion of mother, son and daughter. They return from several places. After many days, they pass some delightful moments though at last of this chapter Rehana lost the unknown Major.

16 December 1971, is the last chapter of *A Golden Age*. The closing chapter starts with a note of hope:

“Dear husband, the war will end today” (Anam 2007:269).

Here we find Rehana’s brother-in-law Fayez who dooms for his collaboration with West Pakistani. The novel ends with a hopeful letter-

Dear husband,

Today I have come here to tell you how we survive... I know what I have done. This war takes away so many boys only my son survives. This time so many girls burn only my girl left (Anam 2007:273-274).

Chapter-04

4. Conclusion

A Golden Age is such a fiction where personal conflicts, memories as well as dreams have taken shelter under the shade of history. Anam possesses some unique qualities in her storytelling. The book is fully separate from other history based liberation books of Bangladesh. Whereas in other books, history of 1971 gets more priority than story but in this book, Anam shrewdly avoids many of the controversies of history. She presents the war history through a personal story. Personal conflicts, dreams, love, marriage and other trivial activities are given importance in *A Golden Age*. From the beginning to the end, we find a loveable, tenderly Rehana Haque who is always committed to her husband, to her children. In a word, she is such a finest character in this novel who can easily accept anyone into her arms. Anam spreads the whole nine months war in several chapters. Interestingly, Anam avoids the violence and bloodshed available in other literature on liberation war. By telling a story in which the family is reunited and by focusing on the survival of the family members, Anam is trying to highlight love and tenderness that was tested during the war.

Finally, at the end of this paper, it can be said that *A Golden Age* gives much emphasis on personal story. Anam is very selective in her method and interpretation of liberation war. She has cleverly avoided the gory detail that tends to make war literature an occasion for sad remembrance. Instead, she focuses on a happy conclusion that celebrates humanity and family

relationship. It seems that as a post-war generation writer, the violence of war is a distant feature for Anam. Hence, she is interested in finding a glorious middle path, without problematising

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history. While she celebrates the time as mythical and classical *A Golden Age*, the book upholds a message of an ongoing battle for humanity and restoration.

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